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4 SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE
5 JANUARY 6TH ATTACK ON THE U.S. CAPITOL,
6 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
7 WASHINGTON, D.C.

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11 INTERVIEW OF: ELAINE L. CHAO

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15 Thursday, August 4, 2022

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17 Washington, D.C.

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20 The interview in the above matter was held via Webex, commencing at 2:03 p.m.

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2 Appearances:

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5 For the SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE

6 THE JANUARY 6TH ATTACK ON THE U.S. CAPITOL:

7

8 [REDACTED] STAFF ASSOCIATE

9 [REDACTED] INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

10 [REDACTED] CHIEF INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

11 [REDACTED] INVESTIGATIVE COUNSEL

12 [REDACTED] PROFESSIONAL STAFF MEMBER

13

14

15 For ELAINE L. CHAO:

16

17 STEWART CROSLAND

18 JAMES BURNHAM

1

2 [REDACTED] Good afternoon, everyone. This is a transcribed interview of
3 Secretary Elaine Chao conducted by the House Select Committee to Investigate the
4 January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol pursuant to House Resolution 503.

5 Secretary Chao, thank you very much for being here. Could you please state
6 your full name and spell your last name for the record?

7 Ms. Chao. The full name is Elaine L. Chao, C-h-a-o.

8 [REDACTED]. And you are represented, I see, by counsel.

9 Counsel, if you could introduce yourselves as well.

10 Mr. Crosland. Yeah. My name is Stewart Crosland. Stewart is S-t-e-w-a-r-t,
11 and the last name is Crosland, C-r-o-s-l-a-n-d.

12 Mr. Burnham. And my name is James Burnham, J-a-m-e-s, B-u-r-n-h-a-m, from
13 Jones Day.

14 [REDACTED] Great. Thank you, Stewart and James.

15 And, again, welcome, Secretary Chao. My name is [REDACTED]. I'm the chief
16 investigative counsel to the select committee. With me from the committee today are
17 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is an investigative counsel, [REDACTED] is
18 a professional staff member.

19 This will be a staff-led interview. If any members of the committee join via the
20 Webex platform, I will stop and note their presence, Secretary Chao, so you will be aware
21 of that. Sometimes they may choose to ask a question and we'll facilitate that as well.

22 There's an official reporter who is transcribing the record of the interview.
23 Please wait until each question's complete before you begin your response, and we will
24 try to wait until your response before asking our next question. Just keep in mind that
25 the court reporter can't record nonverbal answers, like shaking your head. So it's

1 important that you answer each question with an audible, verbal response.

2 We just ask that you provide complete answers based on your best recollection.

3 If a question isn't clear, then just ask for clarification. And if you don't know the answer,
4 then just say so.

5 Although this interview is not under oath, it's voluntary, I just have to remind
6 you -- and this is not specific to you, this is a standard admonition -- that it is unlawful to
7 deliberately provide false information to Congress.

8 Do you understand all of those guide rules before we get started?

9 Ms. Chao. Yes.

10 [REDACTED] Great. And, obviously, if you need a break at anytime, if you want
11 to consult with counsel, or if you just need a break for any purpose, just say the word and
12 we will accommodate that.

13 EXAMINATION

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q All right. Secretary Chao, let's -- again, thank you. You are here -- I just
16 want to make clear from the outset that you're here voluntarily, not pursuant to a
17 subpoena or any process, and just on behalf of the committee, wanted to thank you again
18 for that.

19 I do want to show you one document, which I believe your counsel have already
20 received, it's exhibit 1, and it's a letter from the current White House Counsel's Office.

21 [REDACTED], if you can put that on the screen.

22 This is a letter, Secretary Chao, that was sent, I believe, to your counsel and copied
23 to us, that indicates that the current White House Counsel does not believe that any
24 assertion of executive privilege would be appropriate based on questions that we intend
25 to ask you.

1 Do you have any questions about this or understand the views of the current
2 administration about executive privilege?

3 A I have no questions.

4 Q Okay, great.

5 All right. [REDACTED], you can take that back down.

6 So let's just start with a little bit about your background. You have had a really
7 extensive and impressive record in public service, and I would love for you to start from
8 your time at Mount Holyoke and Harvard Business School and just give us a quick
9 summary of all of the interesting and impressive things you've done since then.

10 A I went to college and then to business school. And upon graduation, I
11 entered Citibank. Then was a White House fellow. I went back to banking, to Bank of
12 America, and was subsequently asked to come back as a deputy maritime administrator.
13 Came back for that position. And then I was chairman of the Federal Maritime
14 Commission. And subsequent to that, deputy secretary of Transportation. And
15 subsequent to that, director of the Peace Corps. And then president and CEO of United
16 Way of America. And I left that to go with a think tank, and then was nominated for
17 Secretary of Labor in 2001. And then left in 2009 and went into the private sector again,
18 and was nominated and confirmed for the Secretary of Transportation in 2017.

19 Q And served until your resignation on January 7th of 2021?

20 A Correct.

21 Q Right. And we'll come back to that.

22 What have you been doing since leaving the job as Secretary of Transportation?

23 A I've been spending some time with my family, much neglected I have to say.
24 And I'm also now professionally with a think tank, I'm on a number of boards, nonprofit
25 and corporate boards, and I'm enjoying life.

1 Q Good. I'm looking forward to being able to say that at some point in the
2 near future as well. Spending time with family in particular.

3 So let's go right to January 6th. I would love to just begin with where you were
4 that day. Were you in Washington or elsewhere?

5 A I was in Washington.

6 Q Okay. Were you aware of plans, Secretary Chao, before the 6th, for the
7 Ellipse rally at which President Trump spoke?

8 A Slightly. But I didn't pay attention -- very much attention to it.

9 Q I see. So I take it you had no involvement in discussions of speakers or
10 planning for the Ellipse or other events planned for that day in Washington?

11 A No.

12 Q Okay. Had you heard anything prior to the 6th about the possibility of civil
13 unrest or violence anywhere associated with that event or at the Capitol?

14 A No.

15 Q Privy to any intelligence about crowds gathering or expectations for those
16 events?

17 A No.

18 Q Okay. I take it, then, that you didn't attend the rally at the Ellipse, the
19 President's speech?

20 A No.

21 Q How did you first, then, become aware of violence at the Capitol?

22 A I was at the Department, and I was taking farewell photographs with
23 employees. So there was a long line, and that took about the afternoon. And an
24 assistant came in at about, I think, 3:30, and said that the Capitol had been breached, I
25 think that was the word.

1 Q I see. So before that moment when your assistant gave you that notice,
2 you were not aware of anything from television or other sources?

3 A I was taking photographs with departing --

4 Q Yeah, understood. Did you watch or listen to the President's speech or
5 have any information about what he said at the Ellipse?

6 A No. It was a busy --

7 Q Okay.

8 A It was a busy day.

9 Q Yeah. When you got that word at, you said around 3:30, what if any official
10 action did you take in your position as the Secretary in the wake of or upon notice of the
11 unrest at the Capitol?

12 A I was in the middle of taking pictures. There was a long queue of
13 colleagues who were waiting a long time to take their photograph. And I didn't really
14 quite understand what the assistant told me, squeezed in between all of these, you know,
15 the click of the camera. I didn't quite understand.

16 Q At some point, did you get additional information and more clarity about
17 what was going on at the Capitol?

18 A It was probably at the end of the day.

19 Q Okay. After the violence had been essentially stopped or law enforcement
20 had moved in? I'm just trying to get a sense of when you were sort of fully aware of
21 what was --

22 A I don't -- yeah. I don't know, because I wasn't aware of what was -- too
23 much as to what was happening. There were so many things happening at the
24 Department. So I can't tell you when the violence stopped because I wasn't sure at that
25 time.

1 Q Yeah. And the Department of Transportation is some distance from the
2 Capitol. It didn't require any physical security or anything like that within the
3 Department?

4 A No. We're a ways away.

5 Q Yeah, I understand. All right. At any point on January 6th, did you talk to
6 or attempt to talk to anyone at the White House?

7 A No.

8 Q Did you reach out to the President, the chief of staff, anyone there, once you
9 became aware of the violence?

10 A No.

11 Q Okay. How about the Vice President or any members of his staff?

12 A No.

13 Q Did you -- have you ever learned of others who had conversations with
14 President Trump himself on January 6th? If you didn't have them, anyone recount for
15 you that they had conversations with him that day?

16 A You mean at that time or afterwards?

17 Q At any point afterwards. I'm just wondering if you're aware of who the
18 President may have spoken to during the day of January 6th.

19 A No. Aside from what I've read in the newspapers, I don't have any idea.
20 And I'd left by then.

21 Q Yeah. And I appreciate that answer, Secretary Chao. I'm looking here for
22 your personal knowledge, not the stuff that you have read about in the newspaper, and I
23 appreciate that distinction.

24 A No, I don't -- I don't know of anybody personally that had spoken with him.

25 Q Okay. How about other members of the Cabinet? Like, once you became

1 aware that afternoon or evening of violence, did you have conversations with any of your
2 colleagues within the Cabinet?

3 A No. There -- there was one person who publicly, I think, said that they
4 spoke with me, but I have very little recollection.

5 Q Yeah. Secretary Scalia actually has been before the select committee, and
6 he has, yes, exactly, said that he believes he had a conversation with you, that you called
7 him that evening, the evening of January 6th.

8 Do you remember speaking to Secretary Scalia that evening?

9 A I don't.

10 Q Do you remember speaking to him at any time about the events at the
11 Capitol, or tell us then about, even if you can't place it in time, the first conversation you
12 had with Secretary Scalia?

13 A I don't remember. He and I speak about labor issues because I was a Labor
14 Secretary.

15 Q Okay.

16 A So we would speak labor issues when he was Secretary.

17 Q Okay. Did you ever talk to him about January 6th and about your decision
18 to resign?

19 A No.

20 Q At any time?

21 A [Inaudible] decision.

22 Q I'm sorry. I interrupted you. Say that again.

23 A I did not talk to him about resignation.

24 Q Okay. Scalia indicated in his testimony that you discussed the attack on the
25 Capitol and how horrible it was; that you asked him what you thought they, meaning the

1 two of you, should do. He replied that he was disturbed but wanted to think about it
2 some more, and that you and he agreed to talk again on the 7th.

3 Again, does his description of that conversation refresh your recollection or help
4 you recall a conversation like that with James Scalia?

5 A A little bit, vaguely, but I don't remember too much about the details.

6 Q Okay. Beyond what I just read, Secretary Scalia's recollection, do you have
7 anything else that was discussed with him?

8 A I don't remember. It was a pretty shocking day.

9 Q Yeah. Yeah. Obviously, for everyone, but I get -- I got the sense from
10 Secretary Scalia that you were -- his view was that you were reaching out for him, looking
11 for some advice or some guidance about what the appropriate response was. Is that
12 accurate?

13 A It's possible.

14 Q Did you reach out to others for advice and guidance as you contemplated
15 what to do in the wake of the violence at the Capitol?

16 A I doubt it. I don't think so.

17 Q The decision you made was strictly yours and not informed by discussions
18 with Secretary Scalia or others?

19 A Not at all.

20 Q Do you remember whether you spoke to any other colleagues in the Cabinet
21 besides Secretary Scalia?

22 A No. I don't speak that often with other colleagues.

23 Q Okay. All right. Do you recall talking with Secretary Scalia about the 25th
24 Amendment, the possible Cabinet invocation of the 25th Amendment?

25 A I do not.

1 Q How about others, did you ever participate in a conversation on that topic
2 with anyone?

3 A No.

4 Q Secretary Scalia has testified also that he suggested, and I believe this was
5 the next day, that the Cabinet should convene, should actually have a meeting with the
6 President to discuss decisionmaking for the last couple of weeks of the administration.

7 Do you remember discussing that prospect of a Cabinet meeting with Secretary
8 Scalia?

9 A I don't. You know, this is the waning days of the administration. We were
10 getting ready to leave. I was very concerned about my appointees, and that's what I
11 was focused on, helping them get placed, helping to out-place them, helping them get
12 jobs, and, you know, basically tidying up, getting organized and leaving.

13 Q Yeah. Of course, completely understand, Secretary Chao. But it was also
14 a very shocking day and one that led to your resignation, which I'll get to. So it's a big
15 decision to leave even a couple of weeks early. I'm just wondering if you consulted with
16 others and particularly --

17 A No.

18 Q -- given Secretary Scalia's testimony that you had a conversation with him.

19 A I would not even -- Secretary Scalia is an honorable man. He would not
20 have said it if it didn't happen, but I have no recollection of it. And I would not have
21 consulted him or anybody else on that kind of a decision.

22 Q Let's talk about the decision. Tell us when you made the decision to resign.

23 A You know -- when did I make the decision? That's kind of a hard question
24 to answer. It kind of developed as more information came in as to what happened and
25 the full ramifications of the actions that were taken by some people and the results that

1 occurred. I think it was -- it was developing.

2 But as I mentioned, when I was first told, I didn't understand what that -- I mean,
3 it was so inconceivable, I didn't understand it.

4 Q Yeah.

5 A I couldn't understand it. Then I had a full day of events that I had to go
6 through, and it was probably at the end of the day that, you know, I -- I probably learned,
7 turned on the television, for example. I don't know, but it was probably toward the end
8 of the day that I began to kind of pay more attention, obviously, and the full weight of
9 what had happened, and then seeing the visuals weighed on me.

10 Q Yeah. You said that the full ramifications of actions taken by some people.
11 Tell us more about what you mean by that. How did that -- what were those actions,
12 who were those people, and how did that influence your decision?

13 A Both positive and negative. I mean, the bravery of the U.S. Capitol Police
14 and, you know, those who were hurt, those who were trying to defend the Capitol, and
15 then the actions of the intruders and how they broke through the glass.

16 I did not actually see too much footage on the rally outside. It was much more
17 the break-in, the attack on the Capitol itself.

18 Q Okay. I'm curious as to how the bravery of the police or the violence of the
19 rioters made you think that resignation was appropriate. Tell us more about why that
20 became, in your mind, and you took that action that you needed to step away from your
21 position in the Trump administration.

22 A Well, I think my statement, which came out the following morning, speaks
23 for itself.

24 Q I'll just read a couple of parts of that and ask you to comment on it.

25 Your resignation letter, first to President Trump, discussed the accomplishments

1 of the Department during his administration. And you said, Lastly -- this is a quote:
2 Lastly, I had planned on serving through to the end of your term in office, but after
3 yesterday's events at the U.S. Capitol, I will resign as U.S. Secretary of Transportation
4 effective Monday, January 11th, to provide a short period of transition.

5 So tell me more, why it is, again, that instead of serving until the end of the
6 administration, the events at the Capitol made you leave early?

7 A I think the events at the Capitol, however they occurred, were shocking, and
8 it was something that, as I mentioned in my statement, that I could not put aside.

9 Q Did you have trouble continuing to serve in President Trump's Cabinet
10 because of his actions that led to or moved people toward the Capitol that day?

11 A You know, it's always -- it used to be that it is an honor to serve. And if the
12 President asked you to serve, there's only one answer. I am grateful for the opportunity
13 to have served my country. And at a particular point, the events were such that it was
14 impossible for me to continue, given my personal values and my philosophy.

15 I came as an immigrant to this country. I believe in this country. I believe in
16 the peaceful transfer of power. I believe in democracy. And so I was -- it was a
17 decision that I made on my own.

18 Q I understand, Secretary Chao, and I, again, very much appreciate that
19 commitment to public service.

20 I guess my question is, did you feel like President Trump somehow failed to meet
21 the moment on January 6th, and that resulted in you being unable to continue to serve,
22 even for 10 more days, in his Cabinet?

23 A I wish that he had acted differently, yes.

24 Q How so?

25 A Well, you have heard of many, many people offer suggestions. I had -- I

1 wish that he had called a halt to the violence.

2 Q Did you, at any point over the course of the day, encourage him to do so,
3 directly or indirectly?

4 A I did not call him, nor -- I did not -- yeah, I did not call him.

5 Q I understand. Are you aware of others who did and yet he refused to call a
6 halt, in your words, to the violence?

7 A I'm not -- I was not in conversation with other people who had called him.

8 Q Okay. Why was it, Secretary Chao, that his failure to act sooner was of
9 such magnitude that you felt like you needed to leave immediately as opposed to stay
10 through the end of the term? Explain that decision more if you can.

11 A Well, I think in politics, once you say you're leaving, you're leaving, and
12 there's no sense staying around. So I stayed around for 4 days to facilitate a good
13 transition for my successor, to take care of loose ends with those who have worked with
14 me and needed my help.

15 I was writing recommendation letters. I wanted to -- giving referrals. I wanted
16 to finish that to make sure that they were taken care of.

17 Q I understand. But Secretary Scalia, for instance, decided to stay until the
18 very end, and you did not. And I'm curious, again, as to why you felt like you needed to
19 hasten your plans to leave as opposed to continue to do -- to facilitate the transition
20 through January the 20th.

21 A Well, Secretary Scalia had his reasons, as did others, for staying. I had my
22 reasons for leaving. And as I stated in my resignation statement, I think the events of
23 that day were such that I just could not stay.

24 Q In your letter to your colleagues at the Department of Transportation, which
25 you, I think, actually posted on Twitter, you were a bit more explicit in your

1 condemnation of the President's role in the attack and said this about your decision:
2 Yesterday our country experienced a traumatic and entirely avoidable event as
3 supporters of the President stormed the Capitol building following a rally he addressed.
4 As I am sure is the case with many of you, it has deeply troubled me in a way that I simply
5 cannot set aside.

6 So let me just ask you about a couple of the words that you chose. A entirely
7 avoidable event. What did you mean when you said that the events of the 6th at the
8 Capitol were entirely avoidable?

9 A Well, as I said in the beginning as you started to ask me, my statement
10 speaks for itself. But I think avoidable means, you know, hopefully he and others
11 could've put a stop to the rampage and to the violence.

12 Q I see. So your view was, if he had more forcefully called a halt to it or
13 condemned the violence, it would not have escalated to the point that it did?

14 A I think that's an accurate assessment.

15 Q Okay. You also, in your letter to your colleagues at the Department, say
16 that supporters of the President stormed the Capitol building following a rally he
17 addressed, essentially connecting the storming to the address.

18 Tell me more about your view of how his words impacted the actions of the
19 rioters at the Capitol.

20 A Well, at that time, I didn't know fully what his words were, but they were
21 enough to -- and, also, it was reported as such that he had, instead of asking his
22 supporters to go home -- and he did do that later on but not at the outset.

23 And, you know, if the rally hadn't happened, maybe the breach of the Capitol
24 would not have occurred. Maybe if some people had spoken more evenly and talked
25 more about, you know, our democratic institutions, without stirring people's passions and

1 inflaming some of the very earnest but excited supporters, perhaps all of this would not
2 have happened.

3 Q Understood completely, Secretary Chao. So it sounds like you believed that
4 his words at the Ellipse bore some responsibility for the violence that occurred at the
5 Capitol. Is that right?

6 A Well, they did not calm things down, and that was a possibility and an option
7 that could've been pursued.

8 Q You say in your letter that it has deeply troubled you in a way that you
9 simply cannot set aside. Tell us more about the sort of emotional reaction that you had
10 to it and why it was such that you just could no longer serve in the very important role in
11 which you were then serving.

12 A Well, I think it -- when something as basic as a discussion of what our
13 democracy is supposed to be like, when that doesn't jibe with your own personal
14 philosophy, I think it's time to go.

15 Q Yeah. When you made your decision to resign, did you notify anyone
16 officially? Did you call the President or anyone at the White House?

17 A I called the chief of staff.

18 Q Okay. Tell me about that. Did you reach Mr. Meadows?

19 A I did.

20 Q Tell us about the conversation with him.

21 A It was the morning of January 7th, and I said to him basically what I said in
22 my resignation statement, and said that I had planned to announce my departure shortly.

23 Q Did he react? Did he provide any pushback or any feedback to you about
24 your decision?

25 A No. He basic- -- I can't remember what he said, but it was a short

1 conversation. He was -- I mean, he took the message and said that he would relay it to
2 the President.

3 Q I see. Did he try to talk you out of it?

4 A I think we both knew at that time that that was not going to be a successful
5 conversation.

6 Q I see. Did he express any of his personal views about what had occurred at
7 the Capitol the day before?

8 A No.

9 Q Did he characterize it in any way similar to how you felt about those events?

10 A No. He did not say -- he did not express his own opinions.

11 Q I see. Did he give you any information about his role in encouraging the
12 President to do something the previous day or give you any information about what he
13 did during the riot?

14 A No.

15 Q You weren't the only Cabinet member who resigned that day. Secretary
16 DeVos did. Did you ever speak with her about her decision to resign at the same time?

17 A I think I resigned ahead of her.

18 Q I think you're right. And it was around the same time. Did you ever speak
19 to her about her decision or yours?

20 A No.

21 Q Okay. How about, again, other members of the Cabinet, after you
22 resigned, did you explain to them your decision, discuss why you took the steps you did?

23 A No.

24 Q Now, going back to Secretary Scalia, he indicated that part of the reason that
25 he did not resign is that he was concerned that the President might put someone worse

1 in, in the wake of that. And we've heard that from others. Pat Cipollone, for example,
2 similarly said his decision about resignation was informed by fear that there could be sort
3 of a worse -- was their term -- installed leader.

4 Did you have any of those concerns, Secretary Chao, that the President could
5 install someone worse than you or you -- was that at all a factor in your decision?

6 A Not really. I ran a pretty organized Department, and we knew who would
7 be the next person when I stepped down.

8 Q I assume that would be -- the deputy secretary would ascend to become
9 the --

10 A The acting. The Acting Deputy Secretary.

11 Q Acting deputy, I see. And did that occur, the acting deputy became the
12 Acting Secretary?

13 A Yes.

14 Q I see. Okay. Did you seek to convey your decision directly to the
15 President? I mean, he's the person that had hired you. Did you want to talk to him
16 directly to inform him about your reasons for resignation?

17 A No.

18 Q Why not?

19 A I don't think that would've been a useful -- I don't think that would've been a
20 productive conversation.

21 Q Why not?

22 A He probab- -- he has his own point of view. I have my point of view. And
23 I did the courtesy of notifying him, through his chief of staff, in advance of my
24 announcement. I think that was sufficient.

25 Q Yeah. Were you mad at him? Were you frustrated with him? Were you

1 worried that it would be a bad, acrimonious conversation?

2 A No.

3 Q When you say you didn't think it would be productive, I think was the word
4 you used, or constructive, tell me more about that. Why did you fear it wouldn't be a
5 productive or a constructive conversation?

6 A I'm not so sure what would've been the point. Most people like to talk
7 because they like to talk. Most people like to talk because they want to make -- you
8 know, they want -- they wanted something. I mean, it was pretty clear what had
9 happened.

10 I had made my decision. It was a personal and private decision. I didn't have to
11 convince anyone. I didn't owe anything to anyone. And as a matter of courtesy, I
12 notified the White House of my decision prior to the announcement.

13 Q I appreciate that. So, again, I won't belabor this, but you don't recall
14 consulting with anyone else about this before you made the decision, it was strictly
15 yours?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Okay. Before we leave January 6th, let me just make sure if there's -- I
18 understand you didn't try to call anyone at the White House. Did you talk to any people
19 in the Capitol over the course of the afternoon? And I'm not trying to pry into --

20 A No, not at all.

21 Q -- spousal communications. I'm just curious if you reached out, in concern
22 or otherwise, to people who were literally victims who were there in secure locations in
23 the Capitol during the riot.

24 A I checked in on my husband.

25 Q Okay. Anyone else in Congress?

1 A No. I mean, I hope it's understood, you know, in the -- it was a transition.
2 I've been through transitions before, and there are lots of things to do. I'm a veteran,
3 and there's a lot of things to wrap up.

4 I cared about my Department, I cared about my people, and I was trying to, you
5 know, make sure that the Department was ready to receive the next Secretary. So it
6 was -- it was pretty busy, so --

7 Q Yeah. I know you have a lot of close relationships with people across
8 government, and I'm just wondering if you reached out -- again, I appreciate that you
9 called your husband to check on him, but were there others, friends, professional
10 colleagues, about whom you were concerned and potentially reach out to express that
11 concern?

12 A No. Actually, I'm not a very -- no, I did not. Not that I didn't care about
13 them, but I'm not the kind of person that gets on the phone and just, like, gossips a lot.
14 I don't do that.

15 Q The President issued a series of tweets or statements over the course of the
16 afternoon. Were you aware of them in real time, following them, or had anyone
17 recount to you the things that he said over the course of the afternoon via Twitter?

18 A No.

19 Q I think you said before that you weren't even aware that there was any issue
20 at the Capitol until 3-something in the afternoon and presumably wasn't aware of
21 anything he said before that?

22 A No, because, again, that afternoon -- if you have a group of people, they're
23 all waiting for you and they're -- they're in a line, and you're offering them -- this is the
24 first time they've had -- this is the last time they think they're going to see the Secretary.

25 And, you know, these are people we've worked together and it's an opportunity

1 for me and each person just to chat a little bit, you know, about how are you and what's
2 going on, because these opportunities don't come that often.

3 So I had a line of people, and I was greeting and chatting with these, you know,
4 colleagues, and they were looking forward to it. They got all dressed up, and they were
5 looking forward to the photograph with the Secretary and the 2 minutes or whatever
6 they can get with the Secretary to speak with her, and I wanted to make those moments,
7 you know, memorable, and good ones for my colleagues.

8 Q Yeah. I fully appreciate that.

9 The President at 2:24 tweeted -- the first thing he said during the riot was: Mike
10 Pence didn't have the courage to do what should've been done to protect our country
11 and our Constitution.

12 It was openly critical of the Vice President. I'm wondering if you ever, at any
13 point, talked to the Vice President about his decision, what he did on January 6th,
14 anything having to do with that day.

15 A No. And I did not learn of that sentence until much further on.

16 Q I see. And I appreciate that you didn't know about it in real time. When
17 you did hear about that statement, what was your reaction, much later on?

18 A It's a very unkind, unfair statement on a Vice President who was extremely
19 loyal throughout his whole tenure.

20 Q Yeah. How do you feel, Secretary Chao, about what Vice President Pence
21 himself did during the joint session, his decision to certify the duly submitted electors
22 from the States around the country?

23 A The Vice President did what was right. He did -- he carried out his
24 constitutional duties.

25 Q Have you ever, to this day, conveyed that to him, that respect and

1 appreciation for what he did that day?

2 A I did not. Pretty much after an administration people scatter.

3 Q Okay. So no subsequent contact with Vice President Pence?

4 A I don't think -- there was maybe -- at a funeral.

5 Q And was that just pleasantry or discussion of --

6 A No, no.

7 Q -- that you respect and appreciate what --

8 A Yeah. We were there at -- I think it was -- I can't remember whose funeral
9 it was, we were there at the same time.

10 Q Okay. So it sounds like you've never talked to Vice President Pence about
11 January 6th, about what he did --

12 A Not at all.

13 Q -- his safety, anything like that?

14 A No.

15 Q Okay. All right. The President did, as you said earlier, Secretary Chao,
16 eventually on the 6th, it was at 4:17, issue a video statement from the Rose Garden in
17 which he says: I know your pain, I know your hurt. We had an election that was stolen
18 from us. It was a landslide election, and everyone knows it. But you have to go home
19 now. This is a fraudulent election. We can't play into the hands of these people. We
20 have to have peace, so go home. We love you, you're very special.

21 When you eventually learned of this, what was your reaction?

22 A Well, I think the reaction from even Republicans was that it was
23 inappropriate. These supporters may have started out being very well-intentioned, but
24 some of them got very violent, and such warm words were not really appropriate.

25 Q Yeah. We have heard that from a lot of witnesses, yes, a lot of

1 Republicans. I'm just wondering you, sort of you personally, when you heard that, when
2 telling people to go home, he said that he loved them and that they were very special, to
3 give us more of your reaction to that.

4 A Again, I didn't hear of these words until like later on in the evening.

5 Q I see.

6 A Having seen on television what happened, it was clearly -- more was needed.
7 Those were not the right words.

8 Q All right. Anything else, Secretary Chao, from the day of January 6th that
9 you recall that might be relevant, any conversation, any memory of yours about your
10 personal experience, your thoughts, feelings, conversations, from that day?

11 A No, not really. It was a busy time, and I don't recall very much about
12 January -- you know, about the specifics of what you're asking about January 6th at all.

13 Q Yeah. I mean, it must've been a very difficult day to abruptly leave a job
14 that you presumably loved, did very well, were planning on continuing, just like that.
15 Tell us more, if you can, about sort of how it felt to quit like that, abruptly, in the wake of
16 those events.

17 A Well, we were going to leave. So we were in the process of getting ready
18 to leave. I would've liked a little bit more time, again, so that I could've helped my
19 colleagues, political appointees, who were going to be out of a job. Many of them never
20 realizing, never understanding that political appointees don't serve forever.

21 Many of them were very young. This is the first time they've ever faced a loss.
22 And it was scary, it was frightening. And I wanted to be able to be a backstop to them in
23 terms of recommendations, in terms of helping them, you know, get new jobs.

24 And I've always done that, where -- you know, everybody who's ever worked with
25 me, I take care of them.

1 Q Yeah. Did any of the people that worked with you at Transportation resign
2 similar to you, make the same decision that they were going to abruptly leave because of
3 January 6th?

4 A Yes.

5 Q Tell me more about conversations with them. Who were they and why did
6 they decide to leave?

7 A I didn't encourage them. There were apparently seven political
8 appointees, except for the Administrator at the Federal Aviation Administration who,
9 similarly, after I resigned, made a similar deci- -- made the same decision of leaving early,
10 I think a day afterwards or something like that.

11 Q Yeah. And I understand that you didn't encourage them to leave, but did
12 you have discussions with them about their decisions about why they similarly felt that
13 they wanted to resign because of January 6th?

14 A No.

15 Q Did they notify you, much like you had notified Mr. Meadows? Did you get
16 word from some or all of them that they were also resigning?

17 A I smile because, by that time, I don't think -- I don't think I was the Secretary
18 anymore. So if they told anybody, it would've been to the Acting Secretary.

19 Q I see. So you were there through the 11th, I guess, officially. Do you
20 recall any discussions with any of your deputies or the administrators of the component
21 agencies about this topic, about whether to stay or go?

22 A No. That was also over a weekend. So I think the 7th was a Thursday.

23 Q A Wednesday.

24 A A Wednesday?

25 Q I'm sorry, the 6th was a Wednesday, you're right. The 7th was a Thursday.

1 A Thursday. And so there was only -- and then Thursday, you know, the
2 announcement was made, like, late morning. And because of COVID, we weren't
3 even -- actually, that's something to remember. We weren't even all together because
4 of COVID. We were not together. And there was only Friday that was a workday, and
5 then there was a weekend.

6 Q Yeah. All right. Let me just -- a couple of things about the 25th
7 Amendment.

8 Do you remember talking to anyone about the possible invocation of the 25th
9 Amendment at any time?

10 A How do you define anyone?

11 Q Anyone at all that had -- I guess I'm not talking about a neighbor, but anyone
12 who potentially had a professional, relevant role to play in the consideration of whether
13 that amendment was or wasn't, you know, potentially appropriately invoked, other
14 members of the Cabinet, the Vice President, others who would consider it in Congress.
15 Did you talk to anyone like that about the 25th Amendment?

16 A No.

17 Q There have been a lot of reports about Cabinet discussions. Secretary
18 Pompeo, Secretary Mnuchin, you know, discussed this openly. I'm just wondering if you
19 were a party to any of those conversations about whether or not the Cabinet should
20 invoke the 25th Amendment and seek potentially to have the Vice President step in for
21 the last 2 weeks?

22 A They did not approach me, and I was not aware of any discussions within the
23 Cabinet on the 25th Amendment.

24 Q Okay. I appreciate that.

25 Did you have any personal concerns about sort of the mental fitness of the

1 President at that point? Separate from conversations, did you have concerns that
2 maybe the 25th Amendment would be appropriate?

3 A By that time, I did not have personal contact with him. I mean, I just hadn't
4 had --

5 Q I'm sorry. I didn't mean to --

6 A I did not go to the White House, there were no meetings, so I hadn't been in
7 close proximity of him.

8 Q I understand that. But based on his action or inaction, did you have
9 concerns that perhaps there was a mental health issue or instability sufficient that we
10 should actually consider the 25th Amendment?

11 A Well, he has his point of view, and he has very strong opinions, like most
12 people, like most leaders. But I did not discuss that with anyone in the Cabinet, nor did
13 anyone discuss it with me.

14 Q Yeah. I understand it wasn't discussed. I guess I'm just wondering
15 whether you had any concerns about his decisionmaking based on what happened on
16 January 6th, practical concerns that steps needed to be taken to land the plane, to
17 stabilize government in the last 2 weeks?

18 A I was not close enough to him. Subsequent knowledge about certain
19 people getting to him, I was not aware of that at that time.

20 Q All right. Secretary Chao, in all of the weeks and months since January 6th,
21 have you had other conversations with people about their personal experience that day?

22 And, again, when I say people, I mean people that were directly affected,
23 government officials, Members of Congress, and, again, I'm setting aside your husband
24 and the spousal privilege issues.

25 A No. I mean, life goes on. Obviously what happened that day was very

1 disturbing, and I've made my position and my feelings quite clear by taking the strongest
2 action possible.

3 Q Yeah.

4 A Then after that, you know, there are other things to do. And I know I've
5 had to personally get transitioned into my private life, get resettled again. This is a
6 bigger -- it's a big issue, but I don't talk about it with, you know, with -- with other
7 Cabinet -- I haven't had very many discussions with Cabinet officers since leaving.

8 Q Yeah. I guess I'm just wondering if you learned anything more from people
9 about their personal experience, particularly people in the White House, about what was
10 happening that day, what the mood was, what was -- what were people encouraging the
11 President to do, anything factual like that that you learned from other people anytime
12 since.

13 A Not really. I mean, I just read the public reports, newspapers, like
14 everybody else.

15 Q Yeah. And I appreciate that. I'm not looking for public reports. I'm
16 wondering if you recall any conversation with people about their lived experience that
17 day.

18 A No.

19 Q Okay. Not Cabinet members, not White House officials?

20 A I really haven't talked to very many of them at all.

21 [REDACTED] All right. Let me pause here and see, [REDACTED] if you have
22 anything about January 6th. I don't think we have any Members on the line.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q All right. Secretary Chao, [REDACTED] is going to ask you a few questions
25 about events related to the election, but I just wanted to ask you one final question.

1 Anything else at all about January 6th or the events of January 6th that I haven't
2 asked you that you think is important for the committee to know, anything else that you
3 want to say about those events?

4 A No.

5 Q Okay.

6 A I think you've asked a lot, and I've given the best --

7 Q I'm sorry?

8 A I said, you've asked a lot of questions and I've given the best answers that I
9 could.

10 Q Okay. Thank you. Let me ask [REDACTED] now to turn to the
11 election-related issues.

12 Go ahead.

13 EXAMINATION

14 BY [REDACTED]

15 Q Secretary Chao, I'm just going to ask you a few questions about the time
16 period leading up to January 6th.

17 Did you have any involvement in President Trump's reelection campaign either
18 before or after election day?

19 A No.

20 Q Okay. So no pending any surrogate calls or campaign events, strategy
21 sessions, anything like that?

22 A Definitely not strategy sessions, no -- no surrogate calls. Yeah, I wasn't
23 really involved.

24 Q Do you remember talking to anyone from the campaign or in the White
25 House about the campaign strategy, you know, legal strategy, strategy before Congress,

1 media, with the Vice President, anything like that, either before or after election day?

2 A No. No. I did go -- I did go to the convention.

3 Q Excuse me. The convention?

4 A [Nonverbal response.]

5 Q Okay. You attended the convention in, what was that, maybe August
6 2020?

7 A Right.

8 Q Or maybe it was before.

9 Okay. But aside from that, any conversations one-on-one with anyone involved
10 with the campaign?

11 A No. And even during the -- I mean, you asked whether what contacts I've
12 had in terms of the campaign, which is why I thought -- I mentioned the convention. But
13 even there, I mean, I didn't do very much. You know, it was primarily to go as a spouse.

14 Q Okay. Post-election day -- election day was November 3rd, 2020 -- did you
15 talk to anyone in the White House or elsewhere in the administration about the
16 messaging around the election?

17 You know, for example, you, as Secretary of Department of Transportation, if you
18 should have -- how you should be messaging the election, whether it was stolen, that
19 there's going to be a second term for President Trump, anything like that?

20 A No.

21 Q Okay. Do you recall receiving any guidance from anyone in the
22 administration about how to talk about the election?

23 A I don't think so.

24 Q Do you recall any conversations with anyone in the White House or
25 elsewhere in the administration, including President Trump, where they expressed to you

1 that the election had been stolen or rigged or corrupted, you know, in some way?

2 A I was never in a one-on-one meeting. I was always in large meetings, like it
3 was a Cabinet meeting or it was a meeting on a particular issue. In my case, it would be
4 transportation. There would always be other people around. And in such a gathering,
5 the President would make -- I think he probably would say that the election was -- was
6 not honestly conducted.

7 Q Tell us what you recall about those comments by President Trump about the
8 election.

9 A It would be what you hear, you know, publicly. I mean, there really is no
10 difference between what he says privately versus what he says publicly.

11 Q So the election, he'd say, for example, like, the election was stolen?

12 A I can't attest that he said that specifically, but it probably would be
13 something that -- you know, something to that effect.

14 Q Do you recall about how many times this happened, in like how many
15 different meetings you recall him making comments like this?

16 A I don't.

17 Q Okay.

18 A I wasn't at the White House that often. And if I did, it was on
19 transportation issues.

20 Q Okay. So in these meetings where he made these comments, you weren't
21 meeting actually about the election. He would just make a comment, even though it
22 was unrelated to the topic of the meeting?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Do you remember how it would even come up where he would talk about
25 the election?

1 A He would talk about lots of things.

2 Q A lot of things that had nothing to do with why you were there for the
3 meeting?

4 A Well, we would, of course, talk about what was the topic at hand, but he
5 would also talk about other things that most people would in a conversation.

6 Q Do you recall other comments he made about the election? You talked
7 about the election, you know, being, you know, stolen or rigged. Anything else, any
8 kinds of comments he made in these meetings?

9 A Actually, I should be more careful, because I'm not quite sure. You know, it
10 all kind of runs together. He would opine upon different things. He probably did opine
11 upon the election, but I don't recall too much of it.

12 Q Do you recall anyone's reaction to when he would make comments about
13 the election in these meetings?

14 A No. He would be speaking.

15 Q You recall people would just listen and not necessarily engage?

16 A He could speak at length.

17 Q Do you remember him ever making a comment about how he was going to
18 be there for a second term?

19 A No.

20 Q Or how about how he -- any actions that he was taking in connection with
21 the election? Do you remember him talking about cases he was -- his campaign was
22 bringing or any sort of strategy he was pursuing?

23 A No.

24 Q Do you recall -- I'm wondering if you have any better or clear recollection
25 about these meetings who might've been there.

1 A Probably -- I hate to throw people into the briar like -- in the briar patch like
2 this, but probably whoever worked on transportation issues would be the ones that
3 would be in the meeting.

4 Q And we are aware of a visit you had at the White House on December 18th,
5 2020. Does that sound around -- not to hold you to it, I know this was quite a long time
6 ago. Could that have been around the time when you met with President Trump and
7 potentially others and he made a comment about the election?

8 A No, I didn't meet with him that day.

9 Q You did not. Okay. We had you -- we have White House visitor records
10 that suggest --

11 A You can go through -- I think I thought about that and -- because it was
12 brought up to me that you were kind of concerned about that. And there were
13 Christmas parties going on at that time. So I remember going to a number of Christmas
14 parties, holiday parties, and it was kind of expected that the Cabinet person would show
15 up at these parties. So that was probably one of them. I did not see the President.

16 Q For these meetings where you --

17 A Maybe he appeared and gave, you know, a speech at the balcony or
18 something, but I didn't speak with him.

19 Q Okay. For these meetings where you recall these comments by
20 President Trump, do you remember around when they happened? You know, it
21 would've been right after election day, December, January?

22 A What kind of meetings?

23 Q These meetings where you recall the President making comments about the
24 election, do you remember around when this happened?

25 A Oh, it must've been -- I think there must've been a Cabinet meeting right

1 after the election. And they're all televised. Although I don't know whether that one
2 was. But, yeah, he lets the cameras in like -- at first it was 5 minutes, and then it was 10
3 minutes, and then it was 15, and then they were covering pretty much the whole thing.
4 But it must've been one of those big gatherings.

5 Q Okay.

6 A Not super big, but, you know, like a meeting like that.

7 Q So you think it might've happened --

8 A I think. I'm not sure.

9 Q Excuse me. Sorry.

10 A I said, no, I think. I'm not quite sure. I don't -- I can't remember that
11 clearly.

12 Q So you think it might have been at a Cabinet meeting, at least one of these
13 comments?

14 A I don't -- I don't know, but it was a meeting of -- like, I was not alone with
15 him, and it was -- you know, it was a gathering of some sort, not on that particular topic
16 but on something, on some issue.

17 Q Do you recall any other conversations with President Trump or anyone else
18 in the White House more generally about the results of the 2020 election?

19 A No, not really.

20 Q Did you ever hear President Trump acknowledge that he had lost the
21 election?

22 A That he had lost the election?

23 Q Yes.

24 A No.

25 Q Did you ever hear from anyone that he had acknowledged to them in private

1 that he had lost the election?

2 A No. I'm not too much involved in the politics of, you know, the White
3 House. I don't get involved in any of that.

4 Q We've heard from other members of the Cabinet certain points of time
5 when they came to believe that President Trump had lost the election. Was there a
6 point in time when you came to believe he had lost?

7 A Yes. November 3rd.

8 Q So on election night, you thought that he had lost the election on that night?

9 A Well, whatever -- whenever the -- it was declared, you know, that he lost.

10 Q So various media outlets, for example, on November 7th, they had called the
11 election for Joe Biden. Is that around the time you think you --

12 A Did I get the date wrong? Sorry. Did I get the date wrong? What was
13 the -- it was November 7th?

14 Q November --

15 A The election in 2020 was November 7th.

16 Q It was -- November 3rd was election day, but the 7th was the day that
17 various media outlets, you know, Associated Press, CNN, they called the election for --

18 A Well, whenever --

19 Q -- they projected that Joe Biden had won.

20 A I mean, whenever -- you know, whenever it was common consensus that the
21 President had lost, the President lost.

1

2 [3:00 p.m.]

3

BY [REDACTED]

4

Q And so when you came to that conclusion that President Trump had lost, did you take any steps then towards a transition to a Biden administration or planning your life after the Trump administration?

7

A I've been through transitions before. Basically the GSA was already moving. They were not allowed to declare the official start of the transition. The White House has to give them permission to do that. So that was unusual. But the transition is ongoing. The bureaucracy is already planning for either eventuality. And, you know, whether the incumbent team wins or whether the new team wins, the transition is already underway --

13

Q So you're --

14

A -- before November 3rd --

15

Q Do you recall -- excuse me.

16

A Go ahead.

17

Q No. That's fine. You can continue. I apologize.

18

A Oh, no. I was going to say, and then the transition team came on -- literally came on board on site on November 15th, so there was a lot to do.

20

Q So you mentioned GSA. They made their ascertainment on November 23rd. Do you recall taking steps towards the transition even before November 23rd?

23

A Well, there were certain things that the Department could not do in the absence of a GSA declaration, but there was work that could be done. You know, getting papers ready, getting things organized, wrapping up issues, all of that could go on.

24

25

1 But as for -- sometimes, in the absence of GSA, again, declaring that the official transition
2 could begin, there were certain documents that could not be transferred over.

3 Q And I believe you made a comment a minute ago that it was unusual about
4 the GSA ascertainment, at least based on your prior experience being a Cabinet Secretary.
5 Can you explain a little bit more what was unusual this time around?

6 A It was almost pro forma in past administrations. I think very few people
7 even understood that the GSA had a role in all of this, and the transition after the election
8 just occurred.

9 Q And this time what was your experience?

10 A At the time?

11 Q In 2020. You said in the past it just occurred. It was pro forma?

12 A You never gave it another thought. The election occurred, the winners,
13 you know, those who -- you know, the election occurred and the transition would occur,
14 the interactions between the two teams on each side. And it was chaotic. It was
15 difficult because of the pressures of the time, but it was kind of -- you know, it was pro
16 forma. You kind of knew what to do. There was never any question as to whether any
17 legality was concerned about certain transfers of information and, you know, material.

18 Q And did you say this time it was chaotic and difficult? Is that --

19 A Transitions are always chaotic.

20 Q Okay.

21 A They're chaotic on the way out, and they're chaotic on the way in, which is
22 why it was important to have, you know, an orderly transition, because I care about
23 public service; I care about the continuity of government. We lost. We had an
24 obligation to enable the next team to be able to, you know, have the right materials, to
25 know some of the more sensitive issues which pertain to our transportation sector. I

1 mean, that was all part of the orderly transition process.

2 Q Did you feel that actions were being taken that were preventing you from
3 participating in this orderly transition that you participated before in the George W. Bush
4 administration?

5 A Yes, because GSA did not -- you used the word "attest." They didn't give
6 the go-ahead. So the Department -- we weren't -- we couldn't -- we couldn't proceed
7 with the transition. We could prepare ourselves. We could do other things. But in
8 terms of overtly dealing with the new team, we were not allowed to do that.

9 Q So it sounds like it negatively impacted your ability to help with an orderly
10 transition. Is that fair?

11 A I think the new team did fairly well. They knew what they were doing as
12 well.

13 Q Okay. But it sounds like you felt like, perhaps, more could have been done
14 to help you facilitate this transition to the next administration?

15 A Yes.

16 Q Okay. Did you believe that President Trump should have conceded the
17 election?

18 A It's up to him what he wants to do.

19 Q And I understand that --

20 A But he -- but he clearly -- but a more gracious way of handling this would
21 have been to, I guess, concede, although Stacey Abrams, I understand, never conceded
22 either. I think the President should have attended the inaugural, and he did not. He
23 should have done that.

24 Q And in terms of concession, did you form that opinion around the time that
25 you came to believe that President Trump lost the election, you know, around the time

1 when media outlets had called the election for Joe Biden?

2 A Yeah. I saw no reason -- I mean, I -- yeah, I think it was pretty clear the
3 election was lost.

4 Q We've heard from other individuals, quite a few White House advisors, who
5 privately had talked to President Trump and advised him about conceding or focusing on
6 his legacy, you know, the accomplishments of the administration rather than the election.

7 Did you talk to anyone in the White House and, you know, share similar advice or
8 have conversations about that topic with anyone in the White House, including President
9 Trump, post-Election day?

10 A No, I did not. You know, I don't get involved in politics. I mean, I take
11 care of the Transportation Department, and it's very well-run.

12 Q A book that came out somewhat recently called "This Will Not Pass"
13 reported that you had told a friend sometime in December 2020 -- this is a
14 quote -- "Every day the leader and I wake up saying, 'How do we manage the President?'"

15 You know, is that an accurate characterization of a conversation that you had, you
16 know, post-Election Day?

17 A I have no idea where that quote came from.

18 Q Okay.

19 A I don't remember asking it.

20 Q Okay. Did you have concerns about managing President Trump
21 post-Election Day?

22 A Post-Election?

23 Q Post-Election Day, you know, between -- after November 3rd, did you have
24 concerns about trying to manage him?

25 A I think throughout the whole term, there were -- you know, there were -- I

1 had issues at the Department that I was very concerned about, and I wanted enough
2 White House attention and White House resources devoted to these issues. So it's
3 always a concern to make sure that those in the White House are aligned with the
4 Department's thinking and what the goals were at the Department.

5 Q Did you have concerns that President Trump's, you know, interest in the
6 election and relitigating or litigating the results were taking away from what you were still
7 trying to accomplish at the Department of Transportation?

8 A No. It was pretty much toward the end. Time was already running out.
9 There was not enough time left.

10 Q So it sounds like you didn't have any specific concerns related to the election
11 and President Trump's, you know, pursuit of, you know, what he was doing related to the
12 2020 election and how it impacted your work at the Department?

13 A No. We didn't really discuss -- I mean, I didn't really discuss too much,
14 number one, politics, with the White House folks. I don't discuss politics overall too
15 much. And as I mentioned, the election was lost. We had to get going and kind of
16 wrap things up and take care of people, many of whom are in shock that they actually
17 don't have a job anymore. And it is a vast department. It's got 55,000 people, 20,000
18 contractors. It's very decentralized. It's all over the country. It's a big department.

19 Q You know, we've heard from other Cabinet Secretaries in the post-Election
20 Day period that they had concerns about the quality of advice that President Trump was
21 receiving, you know, before January 6th. And I'll limit it to after Election Day. Did you
22 have any concerns about the advice that President Trump was receiving?

23 A Well, it wasn't until later that we all learned about who he was receiving this
24 advice from, and at the time it was not quite clear, because I wasn't, you know, going to
25 the White House that often. I didn't really hear too much about it, and they were

1 dealing much more with kind of the politics part of it.

2 Q And when you say "later," are you referring to, like, in 2022, like this year, or,
3 you know, somewhat recently?

4 A Probably last year when the news reports came out about who got into the
5 White House and who spoke with him.

6 Q So the information that you've learned since then about the advice President
7 Trump was receiving, is that just from news reports?

8 A Yes.

9 Q Okay. And you've touched on this before. You're in a unique position in
10 that you've served as a Cabinet Secretary before and you've participated in a transition
11 process. You know, is there a -- you've touched on this a bit, but is there any other ways
12 that the transition process for you this time around differed from your prior experience in
13 the George W. Bush administration?

14 A Well, the George W. Bush administration in November of 2008, it was
15 much -- the transition was much more orderly, because it was at the end of two terms,
16 and everybody knew they had to leave, so there was not this upheaval. And
17 then-President George W. Bush and his team were very clear about how we had to
18 cooperate -- not that we had to, but that we should cooperate and facilitate the transition
19 to the next administration.

20 Q Was President Trump or the White House clear that you should participate
21 in an orderly transition of power at any point?

22 A Not at all. In fact, they -- again, they forbid us from -- they -- we were not
23 allowed to proceed with the transition until GSA declared, you know, attested that it was
24 okay to go forward.

25 Q And what about after GSA declared to go forward, did you get the message,

1 you know, loud and clear that you should participate and facilitate the transition?

2 A No. But it's the right thing to do, and I know what to do. I've been
3 through transitions before, and I've been through transitions in which the time is
4 shortened. So the transition time is very valuable to the other side as well.

5 Q We've heard from others that prior to January 6th, they had concerns that
6 President Trump would not participate in a peaceful, orderly transition of power. Did
7 you have those concerns about, like, President Trump specifically?

8 A I've never heard him say that. And, you know, you hear things from other
9 people, no -- so what's the question again?

10 Q If you, yourself, had concerns that President Trump would not participate in
11 an orderly or peaceful transfer of power, you know, he would take some actions, aside
12 from GSA, to prohibit?

13 A No. No, it never would have occurred to me. I would not have believed
14 it.

15 Q Okay. Were you aware of anyone in the Cabinet who had those concerns?

16 A No.

17 Q Do you recall any conversations with any colleagues or members of the
18 Cabinet about what you should do to ensure an orderly transition of power to the next
19 administration, you know, aside from what the White House was saying or not saying?

20 A I know what I'm doing. I operate pretty independently, and I know what
21 needed to be done. So the GSA attestation was important because it disallowed many
22 of us -- well, it disallowed the process. So what we could do in terms of the transition, I
23 directed that it be done. And then until GSA allows the transition to go forward, you
24 know, then that was the final step of the transition. But we did as much as we could
25 during the transition that I knew needed to be done so that when the GSA attestation

1 came, we would be able to handle whatever we needed to handle right away.

2 Q Since you've been through a transition before, did you share any advice to
3 any of your colleagues since you've been through it and others may not have been
4 before?

5 A No. Free advice is not something that is readily appreciated in Washington.

6 ██████████: Okay. Understood.

7 ██████████ do you have any questions?

8 ██████████: Yeah, just a couple of things.

9 BY ██████████:

10 Q Secretary Chao, other than the delay, the GSA delay in allowing you to move
11 forward, were there any other sort of specific things that you could point to that were
12 impediments to a smooth transition?

13 A I think that was really key. I mean, for those of us that knew what to do,
14 we had everything teed up, but we couldn't release it.

15 Q Yeah. Once it was released, though, was that it; you proceeded as if it
16 were a normal transition or --

17 A Then the teams can talk to one another.

18 Q Right.

19 A The teams could talk, and then the new team can basically, you know -- and
20 they must have had lots of questions, and then they could have engaged.

21 Q Yeah. I appreciate it. I know how it works. I'm just wondering if once
22 that switch was flipped and the GSA gave what's called an "ascertainment," were there
23 any other things that the White House did or didn't do that made it more difficult, or was
24 everything fine once GSA issued that ascertainment?

25 A Again, I know pretty much what I'm doing, and so, you know, I did what I

1 thought was right.

2 Q Okay. And I just wanted to go back to the quote from "This Will Not Pass."
3 I understand that the quote may be inaccurate, but I'm just looking for the underlying
4 sentiment about managing the President. I'm just wondering if you felt, at any time,
5 that it was difficult to manage the President or you needed to take affirmative steps to do
6 so. And if you could sort of share with us more what triggered that -- if you had that
7 concern, what triggered that and what steps that you took?

8 A I think you have to understand who you work for, and how to get to them,
9 how to help them understand what you are saying, to understand their moods, to
10 understand their -- you know, where they -- what their background is, and how they
11 receive things, something as simple as whether they receive things verbally, or whether
12 they receive information, you know, on paper or something -- or sometimes you have to
13 channel information through, you know, a friend, a trusted person. But I do not -- I do
14 not remember making that kind of a statement, and it's pretty -- if you think about it, I
15 mean, every day, that's saying a lot.

16 Q Yeah. And I appreciate that.

17 A It's also saying, you know, the focus is there every day, so I don't remember
18 making a statement like that.

19 Q Yeah. And, again, I'm not -- I don't want to go back to the statement. I'm
20 just thinking more generally, what did you learn about the person for whom you worked,
21 in terms of managing him, how to convey information, how to get his attention? Were
22 there lessons that over the course of the 4 years impacted that relationship, your
23 relationship with him?

24 A Well, I think for anybody who works for -- you know, management goes all
25 the way around. There's management down, there's management up. And I

1 learned -- I never -- I didn't really know him, so I learned that he liked to have things in
2 short spurts, that he liked things that are visually presented rather than in writing, and
3 that he had lots of opinions about lots of issues. And so, you know, to talk about a
4 particular issue, it's helpful to enlist other people to kind of be messengers as well.

5 So do you have a specific question in that --

6 Q No. You're answering that, and I appreciate that.

7 Were there other people in particular that you enlisted to convey information or
8 get through to the President on things that were important to you?

9 A Most likely it would be through, you know, whoever worked on
10 transportation issues.

11 Q Anyone in particular that you recall using as essentially an ally or a
12 messenger to help convince the President to do or not to do something?

13 A Can I ask my counsel?

14 [REDACTED] Sure.

15 Ms. Chao. I hate to throw someone --

16 Mr. Crosland. Let's mute it.

17 [REDACTED] Yeah, that's fine.

18 [Discussion off the record.]

19 Mr. Crosland. Can you see us here?

20 [REDACTED] I can, yes.

21 Mr. Crosland. Okay. Sorry. I think you had a question pending. We may
22 want to raise it again. Sorry.

23 [REDACTED] Sure.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q And, Secretary Chao, I appreciate that. And I'm not -- let me clarify. I am

1 not looking for sort of granular transportation-specific issues. I'm wondering more
2 generally if in your 4 years of working for President Trump, if there were people that were
3 messengers or whose opinion he trusted who you enlisted on anything that -- again, I'm
4 not interested in the FAA. I'm interested in more broadly who he listened to, who was
5 important when he was making decisions. To the extent you have any views on that, it
6 would be helpful.

7 A Well, I'm not so sure he trusted anyone, but I found Gary Cohn -- that's why,
8 you know, I hate to involve other people. I mean, everyone is just trying to live their
9 own lives these days, and to have to hire lawyers or to have to get involved -- it's an
10 important issue for our democracy, of course, but, you know, I just hate to drop
11 somebody in. But Gary Cohn was one of those people who was very helpful.

12 Q I see.

13 A Yeah, he was really smart, and he was gutsy, and, you know, he was a quick
14 study. And so, you know, I would go to Gary and allies like him and just -- but it would
15 change in particular, whatever the issue is and how -- what the momentum was at the
16 time and what the dynamics was. You know, it kind of changes.

17 Q Yeah, I appreciate that. I understand that Mr. Cohn was actually gone
18 awhile before January 6th.

19 How about the President's family? Did you find that they were influential or
20 were allies potentially or messengers of sorts, much like Mr. Cohn?

21 A I had interaction with them, but I did not really ask them for help either.

22 Q I see.

23 A I didn't ask for help [inaudible] from them.

24 Q Uh-huh. Okay. Anyone else then besides -- and I appreciate your concern
25 about involving other people, but I'm just -- again, anyone that you thought that he would

1 listen to if there was an important issue, in your experience?

2 A It really depended on the particular issue and what was happening at the
3 time, who he was close to at the time, what he felt. I mean, that all -- it was very
4 dynamic.

5 Q Yeah. Right at the end, were there people that were particularly close to
6 him?

7 A At the end --

8 Q The end of the administration, right around the time of the election and the
9 transition.

10 A It was hard to say. He had so many contacts. He would hear from people
11 outside of the administration. He would call people -- this is what I hear. He would
12 call people. It wouldn't go -- and they were not -- the calls were not logged in. So he
13 talked to a lot of people.

14 Q All right. Secretary Chao, is there anything else that we have not asked you
15 about this that you think is important? And I know I asked you that before about
16 January 6th, but anything more broadly that you want to make sure we know before we
17 stop?

18 A I don't think so.

19 [REDACTED]. Okay. All right. [REDACTED], anything else for you?

20 And, again, I don't see any other members on the Webex.

21 All right. Secretary Chao, again, I appreciate this. You did this voluntarily, and
22 it matters. On behalf of the select committee, we really appreciate your willingness to
23 spend some time with us to go through your own process of hiring lawyers and the
24 inconvenience of it.

25 Thank you very much for your time. We appreciate it.

- 1 And with that, we'll go off the record.
- 2 Thank you.
- 3 [Whereupon, at 3:25 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

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Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

Witness Name

Date